

# The Cambridge Classical Course

*An Essay in Anticipation of Further Reform*

BY

F. M. CORNFORD

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Quant à nous, nous respectons ça et là et nous épargnons partout le passé, pourvu qu'il consente à être mort. S'il veut être vivant, nous l'attaquons, et nous tâchons de le tuer.—VICTOR HUGO.

CAMBRIDGE  
W. HEFFER & SONS

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TO THE CAMBRIDGE CLASSICAL SOCIETY

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## INTRODUCTORY

Lord Rea said to Sir David Ramsay, 'Well, God mend all !' Ramsay answered, ' Nay, by God, Donald, we must help Him to mend it.'—*Obiter Dicta*.

IT needs no exceptional powers of foresight to discern that an organised assault will soon be made upon what is called Classical Education. The assailants will not limit their range to the position of Greek as a compulsory subject in the previous examinations at Oxford and Cambridge. They will call in question the whole Classical Course in the Universities and the public schools; and they will challenge not merely its present predominance, but its right to bare existence.

I shall leave to abler hands than mine the question whether the ancient literatures of Greece and Italy are an effective instrument of liberal education. My own opinion (if I may advance it without proof) is that the Classical Course can be made to be as useful and educative as any other course which has yet appeared in the field of competition.\* But I have some sympathy

\* Since it is now recognised that in many ways the Germans understand education better than the English, I am glad to think that my opinion is endorsed by German practice. An outline of the facts which show how high a position in their scheme they give to classics, will be found in an article by Mr. T. Rice Holmes in the *National Review*, September, 1903.

with our critics when they describe our methods of teaching as designed to attain, by obsolete means, an end which is wrongly conceived and, even so, seldom attained in fact. If this be true, the impending attack will be most wisely met, not by an obstinate and blind defence of our system as it at present exists, but by a frank avowal of its defects and a declaration, to which at the same time our actions must testify, that we are willing to remedy them. To valid criticism the proper answer is reform. When the criticism, whether friendly or hostile, gives warning of a determined and powerful onset, it is merely prudent that the reform should begin without delay.

The reader perhaps will smile when I say that classical teaching at the public schools appears to need more radical change than classical teaching at the Universities. But it seems true that the earlier the stage of instruction, the more doubt there is about the proper method. Some competent authorities maintain that the schools begin where they should end, and end where they should begin. That such diversity of opinion is possible shows that the whole question should forthwith be made the subject of searching inquiry by a committee of experts. It may be hoped that this inquiry will be undertaken by the new Classical Association of England and Wales, in conjunction with the similar Association in Scotland. We shall then know how far the public schools have advanced since Dr. Buck gave his famous advice to Captain Borrow. 'Listen to me,' said the divine; 'there is but one good school book in the world—the one I use in my seminary—Lilly's Latin Grammar, in which your son has already made some progress. If you can by any means, either fair or foul, induce him to get by heart Lilly's Latin Grammar, you may set your heart at rest with respect to him; I myself will be his warrant. I never yet knew a boy that was induced, either by fair means or foul, to learn Lilly's Latin

Grammar by heart, who did not turn out a man, provided he lived long enough.'

My present object is not to discuss whether the means in use are fair or foul; nor yet whether the end is, or is not, all that Dr. Buck believed it to be. I am not now concerned with the public schools and their methods. I wish only to lay before the Cambridge Classical Society a few suggestions as to the direction which I believe that reform should take here in the University. A young and inexperienced teacher must feel diffident when he addresses on such a subject as this a body of men who are nearly all older and wiser than himself, and to some of whom, as his own instructors and advisers, he owes an always increasing debt. The reader is invited to take the suggestions on their intrinsic merits, which are necessarily unaffected by the insignificance of their author.

I hasten to say that I am not going to plead that any further modification should at once be made in the scheme of examination for Part I. The present scheme embodies a substantial reform and creates a splendid opportunity. It will be wise to ascertain carefully how it works before we attempt to alter it again. But, grateful as we may well be to those gentlemen who in devising and carrying this measure did a great service to Cambridge Classics, it may not be prudent to sit down in satisfied contemplation of the result achieved, and then awaken, ten years later, to find it less perfect than we dreamed. It is worth while, even at this early stage, to begin a forecast of its future. If I may hazard a prediction, I will say that the syllabus will turn out to be both redundant and defective.

To begin with its redundancy. The effect of the scheme is not to redistribute, still less to lighten, the burden which already weighed heavily enough upon lecturer and student. It is simply an uncompensated increase. No doubt the feeling which might have deterred the Senate from giving its sanction to any

curtailment of the old examination would have been a fear of endangering that ‘thoroughness’ which has been our pride. But it is seldom asked in what it is that we ought to be thorough. It is too often assumed that the only answer must be: a thorough knowledge of syntax. For Lilly’s Latin Grammar we substitute Goodwin’s Moods and Tenses. By all means let us continue to be thorough; but let us recognise that a thorough grasp of ideas is a thing of worth, and quite distinct from a superficial ‘viewiness.’ To retain the full bulk of the old linguistic examination is precisely to encourage a hasty treatment of the new subjects. If these last are to be of real value for education, room must be cleared, and time allowed, for thoroughness in this department also. That this can be done, and done without sacrificing the genuine advantages of the linguistic training, I hope to show in the sequel.

The deficiencies of the syllabus are patent enough. We have found a place for sculpture and architecture, but not for vase-painting, or for coins, or for gems—all of them manageable and fascinating objects of study. I suppose that the reason for excluding these objects was that it was thought to be less easy to deal with them by the method of ‘passages for translation and comment.’ If this supposition be correct, then—without disputing the merits of the method—we may ask what principle dictated the far more serious omission of Mythology and Religion—subjects which may be illustrated from every page of ancient literature. If all that is wanted is men to teach these subjects and time for them to be studied, we ought to find the men, and to provide the time by lightening other parts of the syllabus. I do not, of course, propose that these subjects should be compulsory. But I can see no reason why they should not stand as alternatives to sculpture and architecture.

Such, as it seems to me, are some of the excesses and the defects of the present scheme. The changes I shall

advocate are not great changes. The better adaptation of our teaching and the organisation of the lecture system are, for the moment, matters of more pressing importance than the remodelling of the Tripos. I intend to consider our methods in some detail, with a view to discovering in what fields we can economise and retrench, and in what directions we may hope to expand.

## COMPOSITION AND TRANSLATION

It does not follow that, if ten pounds of meat is too much and two is not enough, a trainer will prescribe six pounds ; for this may itself be too much or too little for the individual who is to take it. It may be too little for a Milo, and too much for a beginner.—ARISTOTLE, *Ethics*.

THE utility of the practice of composing in an ancient language will here be neither disputed—for I believe it is great,—nor upheld—for I believe it is exaggerated. My only question is whether all the profit obtained from the exercise might not be obtained in a much shorter time. In some colleges two pieces a week are set. The men may be supposed to spend on the two together not less than four or five hours.\* Five hours are perhaps for most undergraduates an average working day. Now that we have added so much to their other work, can they afford to give one-sixth of their time to this exercise? Or (as I should prefer to put the question) do they gain much more in five hours than they would gain in one?

On this point I have two suggestions to make. The shortness of my experience as a teacher may tell against me ; but I can claim the compensating advantage, that my experience as a learner is proportionately recent. At any rate, the opinions are offered on their own merits. I may hold them for insufficient reasons ; but it does not follow that they are false.

\* One of my own pupils informed me that he sometimes spent from seven to eight hours.

I have observed, in myself and in others, that the power of writing composition not only may not suffer loss, but may be substantially increased, in the absence of continual practice. The truth is that command over a foreign language which you cannot talk is gained chiefly by wide and careful reading. A man cannot write it until he has begun to be able to think in it; and he ought not to try. Our most backward students produce week after week pages of stuff, of which you can hardly say more than that the words are Greek or Latin words. We stare impotently at the versions. Not a sentence, not a phrase, is Greek or Latin; and you can no more explain why they are not than you can explain to a deaf man why a casual series of notes is not music. The reason is obvious. The student has no familiarity with the literature as it is written. He cannot write it until he has at least entered on the stage in which the right word, the idiomatic turn of expression, the natural mould of the sentence, occur spontaneously and inevitably to the mind. This stage comes only after a fairly wide acquaintance with the authors. To ask him to write before he has reached it is to ask him to use an instrument which he simply does not possess. He is like a man who knows no German trying to talk it with no aid but a dictionary. The remedy which one is at first inclined to apply is to make the backward man do more composition. The right prescription is just the reverse; he ought to do none at all, but read and read until the power begins to come.

At the other end of the scale is the man who, when he comes up from school, writes very nearly as well as he will write three years later.\* In his case the small advance which he makes is probably due more

\* One of my pupils in his third year told me he thought he wrote verse *less* well than when he left school. Probably his standard had risen unconsciously; but if he only does it *equally* well, what of the three hours a week for two years spent in making no progress at all?

to his reading than to his weekly exercises. I certainly found that after an intermission of eighteen months I could write better than I could when I left off. Ease and readiness can be recovered after a long interval by a little gymnastic. In this class of cases, then, uninterrupted and frequent practice is often sheer waste of time.

The bulk of our students form a class intermediate between these two extremes. The amount of composition they ought to do gradually increases till a point is reached after which regular practice seems to be subject to a law of diminishing return. From that point more reading and less writing are the surest means to further advance. And it should not be forgotten that by that time a man has learnt most of the lessons which composition is specially suited to teach. Its educational value is greatly diminished. Our object is to produce, not elegant exercises, but educated men.

If these observations are correct, it follows that composition ought never to be begun before a late stage in the school career. It follows also that the regular production of two exercises a week for three years is not the most profitable method for any of the three classes considered. Every individual needs different treatment; and I doubt whether the rigid enforcement of our present system yields the best possible results with the least possible waste in one case out of a hundred.

So far, these conclusions do not demand a change in the plan of our curriculum. They only show (if they are valid) that the plan should be mitigated by liberal dispensations. My second suggestion is different in scope: it touches the curriculum itself.

In the face of a tradition which is supposed to be venerable because it is antique, some boldness is needed to avow the belief that verse composition ought to be optional. What is a truism to free thought is a damnable heresy to the orthodox. To add that Greek

prose and Latin prose might well be alternatives, is to provoke Olympian thunderblasts. Yet a strong case can be made out in support of both these propositions.

That many men are not, and never will be, able to write verse in an ancient language is, in practice, now generally admitted. But the opinion still prevails that to make the Psalms of David turn stupendous somersaults into the metre which Ovid thought suitable to the Art of Love is an elegant and almost obligatory accomplishment. It is to us what tatting and poker-work were to our grandmothers. Now, it is obvious that all classical men should understand the scansion of ancient metres. Even this object is achieved only for three or four metres in Latin and one or two metres in Greek. I never knew an undergraduate who could scan a chorus of Sophocles; and Pindar might as well have written in prose. Still, it is something to have that familiarity with hexameters, elegiacs, and iambics, which can only be acquired by making them. Probably most of those who have not the peculiar gift of verse-writing are the better for making some attempts at a late stage. But the retention of verse-composition in any other way than as an optional subject is indefensible. To one who comes fresh to this futile task of teaching music to the deaf—if teaching it can be called—it is heart-breaking to think of the waste of unnumbered hours which might be given by the student to education, and would be better spent by the lecturer in doing nothing at all. To encourage this waste by our examination scheme is—I say it in earnest—a sin against education, and a sin against the students, for the employment of whose time we are in part responsible.

On this point I feel no doubts, and I can support no compromise. The other proposition, that Greek prose and Latin prose might be alternative, is more open to dispute, and I advance it with less confidence. To maintain that both are necessary seems to involve the

premiss that each has some specific benefit which the other has not. Yet, a careful consideration of the peculiar utilities of prose composition might show that they are possessed equally by both kinds. The mere power of writing a dead language is in itself valueless. The chief profit gained by the attempt arises from the special effort it entails. Complex ideas have to be analysed into their constituents. Those constituents which are relevant must be distinguished from those which are not. For the elements so selected an adequate expression must be discovered in a language so different from our own that very few of the words it uses precisely coincide in meaning with their dictionary 'equivalents' in English. This process, as all know who have gone through it, cultivates the sense of style, and is a good training in clear thought. Herein lies the peculiar superiority which composition in a long dead, and therefore widely different, language has over composition in a modern tongue. French or German has in almost all cases a sufficiently exact equivalent for even the most complex ideas. Consequently, the process of analysis and reconstruction is rarely necessary. The living languages have, of course, the great external advantage of being useful. But against that must be weighed the great internal advantage, possessed by the dead languages, of being, in this particular respect, far more educative.

Now, if I have correctly described the specific benefit of writing Greek or Latin, it is at once clear that it belongs equally to both tongues. If Latin is more closely akin to a great part of our own vocabulary, Greek has a greater wealth of ideas, and a more flexible idiom. The two are about equally remote from contemporary English. Would it not, then, be wise, in some cases at least, to give up one in order to devote perhaps a little more time to mastering the other, the balance of time saved being spent on

different employment? Few men take to both languages with equal readiness. To some Latin is dull; to others Greek is difficult. Might not every student begin by trying both, find out which is the more congenial, and then concentrate according to his choice?

I should be blind indeed if I were not aware that this proposal is far removed from that uninteresting region which bears the uninteresting name of 'practical politics.' But to hitch one's waggon to a star, or even to a meteor, may just serve to lift it out of a rut. Ask for an ideal, and you may gain a compromise. The previous proposal, to make verse composition optional, is practical and imperative. If we care to save classical education, we cannot too soon begin to work for its enactment.

About written translation I have little to say—for two reasons. First, it does not appear that the men give too much time to this valuable exercise, or that the amount of it need be varied much to suit the requirements of different individuals. Second, no reduction of the amount required in the Tripos would have any effect on the teaching course. Consequently, if this amount is—as I believe it to be—unnecessarily large, the evil comes to no more than so much superfluous labour to all concerned in the examination.

The effect of the additional papers in the Tripos last year was very nearly to double the amount of prose translation, and to increase the amount of verse translation by more than one-third.\* Now, if it was possible with the five translation papers in the old examination to ascertain the merits of the candidates, the whole of this enormous increase is superfluous. There are two rational courses. One is not to require that the pas-

\* The number of lines in the five translation papers was: Prose, 189; verse, 264. The number of lines in the new papers: Prose, 178; verse, 93 (excluding an alternative).

sages in the new papers should be translated. To this alternative there are obvious objections. The other is to drop at the very least one of the old translation papers. To this alternative I can discover no objections at all.

## LECTURES AND BOOKS

Talking of education, 'People have nowadays (said he) got a strange opinion that everything should be taught by lectures. Now, I cannot see that lectures can do so much good as reading the books from which the lectures are taken. I know nothing that can be best taught by lectures, except where experiments are to be shewn. You may teach chymistry by lectures:—You might teach making of shoes by lectures!'

BOSWELL, *Life of Johnson*.

THE tradition of lectures on classical texts goes back at least as far as the Revival of Learning; and the five centuries that have passed since Manuel Chrysoloras lectured in Florence have seen very little change in this method of instruction. I borrow from Sir Richard Jebb's admirable sketch of the Classical Renaissance\* the following description of a fifteenth century lecture:—

'The method of teaching was determined by the peculiar conditions. Among Filelfo's large audience there would be many, possibly a majority, who would regard the lecture mainly as a display of Latin eloquence, and who would not attempt to take notes. But there would also be many serious students, intent on recording what the lecturer said; and of these only a few would possess manuscripts of the author—Cicero, for example—whom he was expounding. After an introduction, Filelfo would therefore dictate a portion of Cicero's text, which the students would transcribe. To this he would add a commentary, dealing with grammar, with the usage of words, and with everything in the subject matter which needed to be explained or illustrated. Thus, at the end of such a course, the lecturer would have dictated a fully annotated edition of a classical

\* *Cambridge Modern History*, i. p. 554.

book, or portion of a book, which he was treating ; and the diligent student would have transcribed it.'

Now, to a stranger from some far continent it might come as an amazing revelation that there are two details—and two only—in this description which will not fit a contemporary lecture in Cambridge. We no longer dictate the text; for the progress made in the art of printing, together with German labour and enterprise, has supplied us with cheap series, published in Leipzig. It is certain, too, that the majority of students do not regard our lectures as a display of eloquence. But, apart from these unimportant details, our method, in perhaps the largest class of classical lectures, is precisely that which, according to Sir Richard Jebb, was determined for Filelfo by the 'peculiar conditions' of the fifteenth century. Here is, at any rate, matter for reflection.

For it cannot be said that in every relevant respect those conditions, so far from being 'peculiar,' have remained without change since 1430. Around and about our small collection of classical texts the scholarship of fourteen generations has built up an enormous literature. Of the most famous authors one may say that not a sentence, not a line, not a phrase, but has been again and again pondered and examined, emended by the acumen of scores among the keenest intellects of Europe, and illustrated from all the resources of laborious and gigantic erudition. The fruit of these toils has been stored in printed books ; and it is these books that make the difference between our conditions and the peculiar conditions of Filelfo.

And yet our method, in the class of lectures I am considering, is the fifteenth century method. We still 'add a commentary, dealing with grammar, and with the usage of words, and with everything in the subject matter which needs to be explained or illustrated.' We carry one more cage of owls to Athens : we foist upon Newcastle one more sack of coals. Meanwhile,

the works of Bentley and Porson, of Lobeck and Madvig, and of a thousand other Titans, stand in rows on the shelves of our libraries, where the student of to-day rarely finds opportunity or encouragement to seek them.

Here I must pause for a moment to guard against misapprehension. Outside the scholar's world it is vulgarly supposed that we spend all our time in putting an infinitesimally higher polish on the texts, in emending emendations and refining upon refinements. And a glance at our learned periodicals—with the exception of the Hellenic Journal, which is too expensive to be seen by many people—would confirm this impression. If the impression were true, scholarship would indeed be a pardonable amusement for men of leisure in a world where nothing more important was left to be done. But it is not true. Work of this sort is indeed necessary as a means; and, further, it trains a faculty of nice discrimination which will not be valueless so long as errors in spheres of wide and acknowledged import continue to arise from blurred distinctions and differences confounded. But this is not the chief employment of many even among professional scholars. In the work of the teacher it holds a low, subordinate position, befitting a means which is never an end. The end of scholarship is different, and I would describe it by the following comparison.

The ancient classics resemble the universe. They are always there, and they are very much the same as ever. But as the philosophy of every new age puts a fresh and original construction on the universe, so in the classics scholarship finds a perennial object for ever fresh and original interpretation. A text may be brought so near perfection that further emendation is nearly useless; and then that chapter of our task is closed. But where the editor ends, the work of the interpreter begins. He who supposes that scholarship has no further interest must either know little of Hellenic art and culture, or

care little for the knowledge, the appreciation, and the love, of beauty.

These remarks have another bearing on our present topic, lectures and books. A certain part of the scholar's results can be put upon record and stand as a permanent possession. It can be deposited in editions, commentaries, and works of reference. Our stock of these, large as it is, is amazingly incomplete. Too much labour has been spent on some parts of the field, too little on others. Many a harvest still waits for the sickle. But every solid addition to our store is an asset of enduring utility. The other part of the scholar's work cannot so well be done by books. It must be done anew for every generation by the living word. This is the work of interpretation which I have attempted feebly to describe. The lecturer holds the clue of an uncharted labyrinth. But, unlike an ordinary guide and interpreter, he has first to kindle the desire for exploration. "*L'essentiel, en effet, dans l'éducation, ce n'est pas la doctrine enseignée, c'est l'éveil.*" It is easy to praise—with no very clear conception of its nature—the Socratic method; it is hard to keep steadily in view the Socratic aim. The prince of educators never communicated a dose of information; he never imposed an opinion or dictated a commentary. His single object was to make the hearer feel that ignorance should mean dissatisfaction and distress, interest and wonder, the unquenchable desire to know and to understand. The books that cause this feeling are rare indeed; it can hardly be conveyed save through the quickening contact of the mature mind with the immature, the shock of an instant, actual enthusiasm.

The intention of the last paragraph is not didactic. I am not so impudent as to teach my own teachers their business, nor so ungrateful as to omit an acknowledgment of the debt I have owed to courses which I have heard as a student. It would be wicked to give

currency to the impression that the high function I have ascribed to the lecturer is not performed by many lecturers in Cambridge. I would not even be taken to imply that the method of Filelfo is not still the best method for certain subjects in which the books give little help. My intention is solely to make clear in what way the scope and office of lectures are different from the scope and office of books. To produce books is the function of a University as a seat of learning. To produce lectures is the function of a University as a seat of education. And my special point is that every important commentary which is published ought to have the effect of reducing by one the number of subjects to which the Filelfo method is applicable. I noticed, for instance, that from the inter-collegiate syllabus promulgated at Oxford last year the name of Sophocles had disappeared. This (so I was told) was the direct consequence of the completion of Sir Richard Jebb's commentary. There will always be room for lectures on the Sophoclean drama. There is no longer room for the old-fashioned philological course on a single play.

Thus, the natural implication of progress is that the sphere of the Filelfo method should year by year be contracted. It must be a mistake to do by means of lectures what is better done by means of books. The new regulations now give an ample field for lectures of a different sort, and our line of advance lies in that direction. It is not yet thought worth while that a student should know an amphora from a cylix, or be able to date a coin or to interpret a gem. But we have decided that he should know an Ionic column from a Corinthian, and enjoy a bowing acquaintance with the Aphrodite of Milo. Here is a great possibility of gain; but if it is to become actual, we want more lectures on these and kindred subjects. Archaeology is miserably under-staffed. We ought not

to expect University Professors, whose proper field is advanced teaching and research, to give their time to imparting rudiments to beginners. The representatives of archæology already do more elementary teaching than we are justified in laying upon them. Cambridge—gird at her as we may—witnesses many an heroic sacrifice. But she must not allow men upon whose writings her fame in two continents depends to surrender the bulk of their time to work which lesser men can do well enough.

We want lectures on vase-painting, on coins, on gems, on inscriptions—lectures illustrated by a lantern and by the collections in the Fitzwilliam Museum. We want lectures on Athenian and Roman topography, on ancient mythology and religion, and a score of kindred subjects. And my point is that room for these courses can only be made by diminishing the number of book lectures of the fifteenth century type. If I were constructing an Utopia, I should imagine a Cambridge ten years hence, in which a number of college lecturers had each made one of these subjects his hobby, precisely as nowadays a certain number keep up their Second Part work. With the teaching so provided, the recognition in the examination syllabus of some at least of these subjects, as alternatives, would assuredly follow.

Finally, a word about books. The situation we have to face is this. A multitude of cheap editions, generally containing superficial and second-hand work, stands between the student and the great monuments of original scholarship. The deliberate purpose of many of these editions seems to be to defeat the aims of education. They are designed to save the student from using his brains, to eliminate any chance of his being thrown back upon his own resources. He buys them because they are cheap, and because they save him trouble. He does not know that the trouble they save him is the trouble of becoming a scholar.

This evil can be met only in one way. We must

make the good books which are also expensive as accessible as we can. A few colleges already possess, as appendages to their libraries, reading-rooms for undergraduate students, where the books which a classical man ought to consult are collected in a small compass, with facilities for reading and writing at ease. As it becomes increasingly evident that college libraries cannot succeed in their present attempt to meet the needs of advanced workers, it will, I think, be recognised that reference rooms of this sort are on the line of most useful development. We cannot provide eighteen complete libraries for lecturers: we can provide eighteen complete libraries for undergraduates. Further, it must be remembered that, while the lecturer can afford gradually to buy a library of his own, an undergraduate, reading Classics or History, never has the time and rarely has the means to accumulate a sufficient collection of books.\*

I argue, then, that the new regulations give us an occasion for gradually breaking with fifteenth century tradition, transforming our method, and diverting our power into new channels. And I urge that the men must be encouraged to rely more on the work of the great scholars of the past, and to learn the elementary principles of research. To make this possible, the books must be placed where they can see and handle them, so that the poorest scholar may have ready access to a collection adequate to all his needs.

\* A colleague has suggested to me that most undergraduates would be helped by the publication of a guide or catalogue, containing a list of editions and of works of reference of all sorts, such as they will need to consult. A list of this nature would also have the negative merit of saving them from wasting time and money on inferior books. It might take the form of a six-penny pamphlet, republished every other year (or every year, if possible), after revision by a small and autocratic committee of the Classical Society. The cost of a pamphlet of sixteen pages would be about covered by the sale of 160 copies.

## THE LECTURE SYSTEM

Yesterday, when weary with writing and my mind quite dusty with considering these atoms, I was called to supper, and a salad I had asked for was set before me. ‘It seems then,’ said I, ‘that if pewter dishes, leaves of lettuce, grains of salt, drops of water, vinegar, and oil, and slices of egg, had been flying about in the air from all eternity, it might at last happen by chance that there would come a salad.’ ‘Yes,’ says my wife; ‘but not so nice and well dressed as this of mine is.’—KEPLER.

To call it a system is culpably inaccurate. The disposition of the starry heavens can scarcely be more casual. It is not, strictly speaking, chaotic: it seems to be in that which I vaguely conceive as the nebular stage of evolution. To be precise, it consists of eighteen systems, each of which contains a number of bodies, varying from one or two to six or seven. Of these eighteen minor systems, six have coalesced into one nebula, and three have gone part of the way to form another. The nebulae exhibit the proper signs of coherent heterogeneity. At this peculiar stage the process has been prematurely arrested; so that we may observe two complex systems and nine comparatively simple ones, suspended in adamantine void and exercising apparently no force of mutual attraction. The intermundane spaces are the home of the gods; who, so far from lying beside their nectar, have business of their own, which they strenuously perform. But (no blame to them!) their labours do not make the process of evolution more expeditious.

Thus, to the first glance, the Empedoclean principles of Friendship and Strife appear to have settled down into a state of final equilibration. Only on a more searching scrutiny some signs of rudimentary interaction give promise that the condition is, after all, unstable. We have, in a word, a few lectures which are really intercollegiate, and not merely open to the members of a federate group. Here, as elsewhere, Dinos is king : not even the eye of faith can detect the evidence of design. Still, we have in this inchoate and casual phenomenon the possibility of an intelligible system.

In Cambridge, the word 'system' falls with ill-sounding menace upon suspicious ears. We shrink in pardonable horror before the spectre of the well-rounded sphere, bound every way (as we conceive it) with red tape about the feet of dictatorial Ananke. Better incoherence, we cry ; better the futile reduplication of labour ; better the fortuitous clash and concourse down the illimitable inane ; better anything, than sacrifice one jot of the sacred charter of *Lehrfreiheit*.

Now, as for *Lehrfreiheit*, I would burn these pages—perhaps in any case the most prudent course—sooner than be suspected of taking the lists as the champion of monopoly and privilege. What I shall try to show is this : that our present lack of teaching organisation does not favour any valuable sort of freedom, but on the contrary has, in great measure, the opposite effect. If its watchword is *Lehrfreiheit*, any one ignorant of German would suppose that this impressive term stood for a peculiarly galling species of slavery.

Consider the situation. Towards the end of the Easter term, some thirteen independent bodies \* meet, separately and without collaboration, to draw up their

\* I reckon as one the six colleges of the larger federation. The smaller group has not, I believe, a common system of lectures. I may be in error on points of detail ; but these do not affect the main contention.

programmes of lectures for the coming year. No one present at the deliberations of one of them would guess that the other twelve were doing the same thing at nearly the same moment with precisely the same end in view. Each produces a scheme. There is no guarantee of any sort that the thirteen schemes will cover a sufficiently wide field, or will not overlap where they ought to dove-tail. There is nothing to prevent the simultaneous delivery to small audiences of four or five courses (say) on the Isthmian Odes. There is nothing to ensure that a student who needs a course on some other subject of equal importance will be provided for at all. Can any one seriously maintain that these proceedings are satisfactory? I think not; but since nothing is done to amend them, I may be allowed to point out briefly how unsatisfactory they are both for lecturer and for student.

It is alleged that the method secures for the lecturer the freedom to choose what subject he pleases. This is all that *Lehrfreiheit* can mean. But does the method secure this freedom? There are, no doubt, some lecturers whose seniority enables them to say, 'This subject interests me; I will lecture on it, and on nothing else.' This is, to my mind, the only right position for any lecturer to take up. But if this is *Lehrfreiheit*, we want more of it. What is the case of the junior members of a staff? \* However considerate their seniors may be, the fag end of the programme, justly and necessarily, falls to their share. For them freedom of choice can be little or none. The subjects chosen must make some show of being representative. Suppose

\* I hope that I shall not be thought capable of the meanness of veiling a personal complaint under the form of a general criticism. But, as there is always some one who thinks the worst, I must, at the cost of obtruding myself, definitely state that I have no personal ground of complaint whatever in respect of any subject mentioned in this pamphlet. I plead for others who are less fortunate.

that there are four lecturers and four selected books, one of verse and one of prose in each language. When the senior lecturers have chosen their subjects, the junior finds himself condemned (say) to Latin Prose. No matter though his hobby be Greek Poetry, and he holds Cicero and Livy in abhorrence. If only ten or a dozen cases of this sort occur every year, it is serious enough. How can a man lecture with freshness and enthusiasm on a subject forced upon him without regard to his tastes? Yet the frequent occurrence of such cases is inevitably entailed by our utter lack of co-ordination. Is it not manifest that a greater freedom of choice is possible when the whole field of classical literature has to be covered once by fifty or sixty lecturers than when it has to be covered thirteen deep by thirteen independent bodies, of which nearly all are less than six in strength?

Further, the College system of lecturing overtaxes even the largest staffs. One course a year is as much as a lecturer—at any rate a young lecturer—can satisfactorily undertake. The preparation involves months of labour; the delivery preoccupies the leisure of a whole term. The rest of the time left over from private teaching and countless other duties ought to be free for fresh study and for writing. Lay upon such men a heavier burden than this, and what may you expect in ten years time? A certain percentage will be jaded hacks. Some, whose intellectual vitality is longer in the killing, will be men of disappointed hopes and broken health. Others, no doubt, will, 'worry through': an exceptional physique and animal spirits will enable them to do the work of two men, and do it efficiently. But from these also the system claims its toll—sacrificed ambitions of authorship, opportunities for study and for thought denied. Meanwhile, the output of solid books by College lecturers is slow and meagre. Will any competent observer deny that this description is in the main a true one? If not, then we are bound to consider

whether our system is the most economical that can be devised.

And now for the students—what does *Lehrfreiheit* mean to them? In the first place, they are, of course, injured by all the causes which tend to make lectures a weary, flat, and barren imposition. But they suffer also in other ways. For what reason do we recommend a student to attend a given course? Because it will interest and profit him? because it will fill a gap in his reading? because he wishes to hear the lecturer? or to study the subject? No. The sole reason we can give is that the course happens to be delivered within the walls of the College to which he happens to belong. We must needs ‘drive the flock that thirsts not to a pool disliked,’ with no better excuse than that the pool lies on this side of the wall and not on that. If we have sacrificed freedom for ourselves, it has not been done to save it for our pupils.

This state of things must continue so long as every College draws up its own programme without reference to the rest, and encourages its men, with little respect to individual needs, to attend just those lectures and no others. It is a system of privilege, of monopoly, of protection. What we want is competition and free trade. I am told there is a difficulty about fees for intercollegiate lectures. The difficulty has been surmounted in other departments here; it has been surmounted for classics at Oxford. A committee of College tutors, bent on solving the problem, could solve it in a week.

The advantages of a single scheme of lectures for the whole University should now be apparent. A course of lectures ought almost always to be the outcome of recent first-hand work. When a man’s mind is full of fresh ideas and quickened by the excitement of discovery, then is the time to lecture, because then is the chance of interesting his class, while the discipline of exposition will test and clarify his results. The lectures

over, the results in many cases should go at once into a book. Finally a period of rest, followed by fresh study of a different subject ; and so the process begins again. As things now are, only a professor can hope to approach this ideal. But the main obstacle which prevents the College lecturer from contemplating it otherwise than with a bitter smile, is our College system of teaching. We want not fewer men, but fewer lectures and larger audiences ; gaining thereby more time to read, to think, and to write.

There is another field in which labour of a very unprofitable kind is wasted like water. A corollary of the College lecture system is the College examination. If we had a single lecture syllabus for the University, we might have a single set of examination papers. Every lecturer would make a paper on his own subject. The men in each college might be examined on the courses they had attended. The looking over and marking could be done either by each lecturer for his own paper, or by the College staff for its own men. It is no trouble to a man to set a paper on his own lectures : to set one on an unfamiliar subject is a heavy task. The saving of labour by this expedient would be greater than at first appears.\*

\* The labour spent on producing translation papers and fair copies might be reduced by a simple device, which entails no change of system. There are perhaps fifty lecturers in all engaged in this work. They either make new papers (by way of keeping their hands in) or reproduce old ones from the College stock. They have no access to the stock belonging to other Colleges. Now and then a volume is put together and published. But the temptation is to include the pieces which are most brilliant, and therefore least instructive ; and publication tends to debar the further use of them in Cambridge.

I suggest that fifty extra copies of every College paper should be printed and kept till the end of the year. Then one complete set might be sent to each composition lecturer ; and he would bind it and transmit it to his successor. The extra expense of printing would be trifling ; it might be borne by those who

I conclude, then, that the College lecture system has always been wasteful and pernicious. Now that we have to find teaching for new subjects, and time for them to be studied, it is more pernicious than ever. It must go.

received the sets. By this means every composition lecturer would soon possess a large and multifarious collection, from which he could select at will. The rights of publication would remain unaffected.

## EPILOGUE

It came to pass in the antiquity of time and of past ages that the Caliph of Bassra called together the three wisest men of all his subjects and commanded them to counsel him concerning the governance of his dominions. For, being young, he knew not that wise men love not to give counsel, and none but fools abide thereby.

The first sage said: Hearken, O Caliph, to the Counsel of PRUDENCE. All things are by the will of Allah (upon Him be the Peace and the Prayer!). Seek not in the days of thy youth to make straight that which is crooked; but rather, when thy beard shall be grey, then do that which seemeth good.

The second sage said: Hearken, O Caliph, to the Counsel of EXPERIENCE. All things are by the will of Allah (upon Him, etc.). With grey hairs cometh Acquiescence. Wait, and thou shalt see that all is for the best; and the desire to mend that which now seemeth ill shall pass from thee, and thou shalt be at rest.

The third sage said: Hearken, O Caliph, to the Counsel of COMMON SENSE. Some things are by the will of Allah (upon Him, etc.); and some by the will of Sheïtan (upon him be the undying malediction!). Incline not, therefore, unto the words of Prudence; neither open thine ear to the mouth of Experience. For that which is of Allah thou canst neither hurt nor hinder: but that which is of Sheïtan thou canst not mend too soon.

Then the Caliph arose from his seat, and embraced the third sage, and put upon him a robe of honour, and made him Vizir over all his dominions.—THE THREE SAGES OF BASSRA.

LOOKING back over these pages, I am astonished at the moderation of my demands. I am half afraid that the reader will exclaim, 'Is this all?' Of course it is not all. I have, with one unimportant exception,



deliberately confined my range to reforms which may be brought into effect in the next ten years. No one supposes that the *Tripos* has already reached a final perfection. No one supposes that the changes here indicated will do more than make it a little better. But if they will do so much, they were worth the argument.

More stress, however, has been laid on changes of organisation. Here I shall not be taxed with being cautious to excess. I do not forget a comfortable proverb which contrasts precipitate folly with angelic hesitation. But—to borrow an instance which is in some respects unfortunate—the recent history of English politics shows that the headlong fool may sometimes carry the angels over the brink.

I have attacked not men, but institutions. If I hate the institutions, it is because they seem to impose a fruitless sacrifice on the men whom I respect and honour.



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